

June 2002



USDA FOREST SERVICE



Forest Plan Update

Greetings

Welcome to the Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan revision update. This update provides a brief description of public comments we received on the proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), along with a projected timeline for completion. While it has taken longer than expected, we remain on schedule to release the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) by the end of 2002.

When I came to the forest last June, the first thing I did was attend a series of public meetings to hear comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and proposed Forest Plan. Since those meetings, we have continued to meet with interested publics and have received over 3700 formal comments on the draft EIS and plan.



We have heard from a cross section of interests evidenced by comments on a broad range of issues facing the forest. I continue to be impressed with the degree of substance and energy that have gone into these comments.

In general, the comments are fairly polarized and fall roughly into two groups: those who tend to emphasize preservation and protection of the forest, and those who tend to emphasize motorized

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Just in Case You Were Wondering.....	3
Public Comment: What We Have Heard.....	3
What Happens to My Comment?.....	6
The Latest on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.....	6

access and traditional use of the forest. Both perspectives are valid and demonstrate strong desires for how they would like to see the forest managed in the future.

Over the next few months, we will continue to validate your comments and make changes to the draft EIS to reflect your concerns. We also will be reviewing the draft EIS and draft revised forest plan to ensure that we do not over commit-- but rather display realistic expectations based on realistic budgets. This is one of the criticisms of our current plan--projected accomplishments and monitoring were based on budgets that never occurred.

Several factors weigh into the deliberation when making our recommendation to the Regional Forester on future management of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest (WCNF): environmental, economic, social and legal. Some of these factors have clear sideboards while others are more loosely defined. Your comments help us better understand the sentiment behind particular viewpoints and values, reveal new information previously not considered, and provide clear understanding of the implications of any decisions for various interests. Ultimately, the decision is one of balancing the needs and desires of current generations with the capability of the lands, the requirements of the law, and the potential needs of future generations.

Where it is not possible to meet all the conflicting uses and desires for the forest, through your input, I do feel that we will conclude

with a balanced framework to guide WCNF management for the next 10-15 years.

I want to thank you for efforts and willingness to remain engaged in the planning process. If you have further questions or need additional information, please call our office at (801) 524-3900 or visit our website at: www.fs.fed.us/wcnf.

Sincerely,



THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Forest Supervisor





Public Comment: What We Have Heard

The Wasatch-Cache National Forest (WCNF) received 3,762 responses during public review of its draft revised Forest Plan and accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Responses were received in a variety of forms including letters, postcards, faxes, e-mail, petitions and public hearing transcripts. A comprehensive 700-page report with a 27-page Executive Summary capturing these comments has been prepared. The following material is drawn from the Executive Summary.

Just in Case You Were Wondering....

In the fall of 2000, the Forest Service published a new planning rule to guide the forest planning process. The National Forest Management Act regulation – published in the Federal Register November 9, 2000 – revised the 1982 land and resource management planning rules and modified requirements for implementation, monitoring, evaluation, amendment, and revision of land and resource management plans. Because we began our revision in 1999, we are revising our forest plan using the 1982 regulations.

Under direction of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) a Forest Service review of the 2000 planning rule found that it was neither straightforward nor easy to implement. The Forest Service therefore, decided to revise and improve the rule. It's important to note the Forest Service is not starting over; the essential concepts and philosophy of the 2000 rule – science-based, collaboration and sustainability are being used for the revised rule. A draft revised rule is expected this summer and will include a public comment period.

Requirements of a new rule would be integrated into the Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan in future amendments.



In general, those who comment on the draft documents fall roughly into two groups: those who tend to emphasize preservation and protection of forest natural resources, and so request greater restrictions on various human uses; and those who tend to emphasize motorized access to and traditional use of forest lands, and so request either fewer or at least no additional restrictions. The distinction between these two groups is not absolute. The former group also values access and use; while the latter group also expresses concern for forest protection. Virtually everyone who comments on the Forest Plan and Draft EIS cares about the condition of the WCNF and about the value it has to users of all types. The difference is one of emphasis, and this often revolves around each group's perception of the nature and degree of impacts caused by human activities, especially recreational activities. These different perspectives drive the comments people offer on virtually every topic.

The full report and its Executive Summary describe public comments on a broad range of topics: the planning process itself, the planning documents, public involvement and collaboration, the relationship of local planning documents with national efforts, the range of alternatives, adequacy of analysis, and so forth.

The following focuses on public response to ten planning topics identified early in the revision process. The topics serve as a framework for the decisions to be made in the revised plan.

The greatest detail is provided for topics on which respondents held contrasting views.

Watershed Health

People asked the WCNF to provide detailed strategies regarding water management in the final Forest Plan, and to more adequately analyze watershed condition and the impacts of various activities on watershed health.

Biodiversity and Viability Management

Most of the comments on these topics address wildlife or aquatic habitat management. Some respondents ask the WCNF to preserve wildlife habitat corridors in a variety of ways. On the other hand, some ask the WCNF not to manage for wildlife corridors, due to perceived conflicts with current use. Other comments under the topics of biodiversity and viability address non-native species, big game species, predators (especially lynx), and native cutthroat trout. The management of management indicator species and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species was also mentioned. Finally, people offer a wide variety of suggestions regarding vegetation management to achieve objectives ranging from the maintenance of old growth, to the reversal of aspen decline, to the prevention of noxious weed spread.



Road and Access Management

Although some respondents favor road construction to correct poor alignments, or temporary roads for management purposes, others favor the prohibition of new road construction-especially in roadless areas. While opinion is divided over road construction, there is a general consensus that existing roads should be better maintained. Most people who address the topic of road closure/removal/obliteration either request that the WCNF close and reclaim roads under certain conditions or that it convert roads into trails. Most motorized recreationists, however, strongly object to road closures.

Several people ask the WCNF to expand the motorized trail system, and to provide more motorized loop trail systems. Others urge the WCNF not to expand the motorized trail network on the grounds that there is already sufficient motorized recreation trail access.

Recreation and Scenery Management

Recreation is the most frequent topic of comment on the WCNF Draft EIS and Forest Plan. General concerns deal with the need for the WCNF to: manage recreation use responsibly, treat all user groups fairly, disperse recreational users, and not restrict access. Quite a few ask the WCNF to conduct a carrying capacity analysis, especially in the Tri-Canyon Area. Some people say the WCNF should educate the public on proper use of the land and increase enforcement, particularly before imposing further restrictions.

Motorized recreation advocates cite heritage, self-reliance, and adventurism along with the importance of off-highway vehicle (OHV) access for families, safety, emergency response, and the elderly or disabled. Opponents of motorized recreation cite environmental concerns, including disturbance to wildlife, erosion, noise, and air pollution. They also point out that motorized recreation affects non-motorized users' quality of experience. Proponents and opponents of snowmobiling and helicopter skiing cite concerns similar to those raised about off-highway vehicle use. Proponents of non-motorized recreation say that certain areas, including many roadless areas, should be restricted to non-motorized uses only. In general, motorized recreationists oppose segregation of uses while non-motorized users favor segregation to deal with conflicts.

Roadless Area/Wilderness Management

Many people ask the WCNF to protect roadless areas, primarily to preserve environmental values. People ask more specifically that many (or all) roadless areas remain roadless, and that development and motorized recreation also be prohibited. Others object to the designation of areas as “roadless.” Those people object most strongly to the implications that motorized access to roadless areas would be further restricted or prohibited.

Many respondents say that the WCNF should not only protect roadless areas, but also recommend many of those areas for wilderness, primarily for environmental reasons. Those people cite multiple ecological, social, and economic benefits to be gained from additional wilderness on the WCNF. A number of other respondents ask the WCNF not to recommend any more areas for wilderness designation. Although wilderness opponents do not generally propose intensive or widespread development, they support the active management of vegetation and motorized access that would not be allowable under wilderness designation.

Suitable Timberlands

Some respondents ask the WCNF to allow timber harvest, primarily with an objective of improving forest health. Others say the WCNF should restrict timber harvest, primarily to preserve environmental values. Some urge the WCNF not to use the concept of forest health as a justification for its timber commodity program; Those respondents consider “disease, decline, and decay (as) vital processes in any natural system,” and take issue with the assumption that a healthy forest would be free of insects and diseases.

Rangeland Capability, Suitability, and Forage Production

Several respondents urge the WCNF to continue to allow grazing, for various environmental and socioeconomic reasons. Many other respondents, however, urge the WCNF to restrict, reduce, phase out, or prohibit grazing, primarily for environmental reasons.



Special Designations

The proposed designation of new research natural areas and special interest areas received general public support; some respondents suggested more such areas than the WCNF proposed. There was both support for and opposition to Wild and Scenic River designations.

Oil and Gas Leasing

A few respondents state that oil and gas leasing should be encouraged. Others say it should be prohibited in roadless areas.

Fire Management

Some respondents assert that the WCNF should more fully utilize timber harvest and grazing in conjunction with prescribed burns-to avoid wasting resources, to maintain a healthy forest, to avert fire risk, to bring the forest back into historic range of variability, and to maintain the viability of local economies. Others, however, say the WCNF should reevaluate timber harvesting and mechanical treatments as means to meet forest goals-because of their inability to restore fire-adapted ecosystems, because of the role of standing dead timber in forest wild fires, because mature trees are needed for wildlife habitat, because young trees have high fuel load values, because timber harvesting cannot replace the role of fire in the forest, and because harvested areas show a strong association with increased rate of spread and flame length.

If you would like a copy of the entire 27-page Executive Summary, please call Kelli Green at 801-524-3906 or e-mail kagreen@fs.fed.us. The full document (700 pages) may be reviewed at our office.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY COMMENT?

So what do we do with all of these responses? We use a technique called content analysis that is a systematic method of compiling, categorizing and capturing the full range of public viewpoints and concerns about the DEIS and Proposed Forest Plan. Content analysis helps us clarify, analyze and be responsive to information the public provides to us.

Content analysis is not a vote-counting process. It is designed to read each response, capture the meaning of the comment, and provide it to the public and decisionmaker in a clear and understandable form.

Each response is assigned a unique identifier. We then read each comment, highlight the substantive content, and code it by subject area. Similar concerns are grouped together and responded to in the Final EIS. Established direction provides that comments be responded to in a variety of ways. Possible responses are to:

- 1) modify alternatives,**
- 2) develop and evaluate alternatives not previously considered by the agency,**
- 3) supplement, improve, or modify the analysis,**
- 4) make factual corrections, and**
- 5) explain why the comments do not warrant further response.**

The Latest on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Many of you have been involved with the roadless area conservation initiative since it was introduced in fall of 1999. After a final EIS was released and much public debate about the merits of the initiative, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, was published in the Federal Register on January 12, 2001. This new policy restricted logging and road building activities in 58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands. Its effective date was delayed until May 2001, as newly-appointed U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials reviewed it.

On May 4, 2001, Secretary Veneman announced that the USDA would implement the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. However, acknowledging concerns raised by local communities, tribes and states impacted by the rule, the Secretary indicated the Department will move forward with a responsible and balanced approach to re-examine the rule. In response to this, the Department requested comments from the public on key issues that have been raised regarding the protection of roadless areas. The agency received 850,000 responses.

At the same time, a total of nine lawsuits challenging the roadless rule have been filed in six judicial districts and four federal circuits. The U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho on May 10, 2001, preliminarily stopped the Department from implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

For now, the Chief has instructed forests to ensure that Forest Plan revisions consider, as appropriate, the long-term protection and management of unroaded portions of inventoried roadless areas. This may include a determination that some roadless areas be recommended for wilderness protection. He believes this will provide full and fair consideration of local conditions, cumulative effects, and other critical information affecting roadless values. Our final environmental impact statement will consider the values of each inventoried roadless area individually.



YOU ARE HERE

NOTICE OF INTENT
September 1999

SCOPING
Public meetings
in key communities

**DEVELOPMENT &
ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES**
Public review
August 2000

**Draft ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT &
PROPOSED REVISED
FOREST PLAN**
Released for review
& comment May 2001

**PUBLIC
COMMENT PERIOD**
until
November 1, 2001
Meetings and hearings
in key communities

ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS
February & March 2002

**RESPONDING TO PUBLIC
COMMENTS & ADDITIONAL
ANALYSIS**
Summer 2002

RECORD OF DECISION
Final EIS
December 2002

WE'RE ON THE WEB

www.fs.fed.us/wcnf

Do you have suggestions about improving the planning website? We're interested in hearing them! Send your comments to kagreen@fs.fed.us.

**Have you received duplicate mailings?
Let Kelli know by phone at (801) 524-3906
or e-mail at kagreen@fs.fed.us**

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